

# Davidson's Test

Donald Davidson's critique of the Turing Test as an expression of  
his theory of rationality

Tobias Lohse

## Abstract

Sed ut pellentesque turpis. Ut efficitur ac neque in ullamcorper. Integer a malesuada erat. Mauris nec fermentum ex, sit amet fermentum purus. Fusce non tellus semper, iaculis erat eget, fermentum justo. In placerat eros a ipsum aliquam, non ultrices libero vulputate. Nunc ut arcu condimentum, accumsan sem id, rhoncus dui. Phasellus pellentesque elementum dui, nec sagittis libero eleifend vitae. Sed sed mollis enim.

## Contents

<b>1</b>	<b>Introduction</b>	<b>2</b>
1.1	Historical Context . . . . .	2
1.2	Donald Davidson . . . . .	2
1.3	The Turing Test . . . . .	2
<b>2</b>	<b>Davidson's Critique of the Turing Test</b>	<b>3</b>
2.1	The Critique . . . . .	3
2.2	Davidson's Proposal for a modified Test . . . . .	4
2.3	Distinction between Practical Interpretation and Essential Theory of Interpretation . . . . .	4
<b>3</b>	<b>Necessary Conditions of Understanding</b>	<b>4</b>
3.1	Social aspect of Language . . . . .	4
3.2	Anti-Conventionalism . . . . .	5
3.3	Ontology & Holism of Knowledge . . . . .	5

<b>4 Explanation of Rationality</b>	<b>6</b>
4.1 Davidson's Program . . . . .	6
4.2 Radical Interpretation . . . . .	6
4.3 Triangulation . . . . .	7
4.4 Unified Theory of Thought and Meaning . . . . .	8
<b>Conclusion</b>	<b>8</b>

# 1 Introduction

## 1.1 Historical Context

History of Davidson's Philosophy

- Vienna Circle and Empiricism
- Wittgenstein and the social aspect of language
- Quine and the new non-empiricist analytical philosophy

Introduction to theories of meaning

- semantic vs. foundational theories of meaning
- brief overview of players

## 1.2 Donald Davidson

Introduction to Davidson

- Basic positioning in history and schools
- Main areas of work
- Clarification of Focus of the thesis
- Hint at Donald's interesting Life<sup>1</sup>

## 1.3 The Turing Test

Description of Turing Test

- Background to Tourings' paper
- relevance of the test, other tests
- Davidson and other versions of the test
- The state of AI

---

<sup>1</sup>See some reference for this.

## 2 Davidson's Critique of the Turing Test

### 2.1 The Critique

(E4.5)

Why the test is interesting to Davidson

- Test is concerned with the nature of thought
- Pragmatic approach to the question of thought
- Empiric criterion for thought
- Not confined to

Turing's proposed test shows that he agrees with Davidson on the fact that linguistic competence is essential to intellect. And I think we also have to interpret Davidson and Turing as agreeing that there is a scientific approach that can describe essential parts of our linguistic competence. In the case of Turing this is evident in his belief that there is a program that allows the computer to win the imitation game. For Davidson it is evident in his proposal of the empiric Unified Theory that can capture the essence of linguistic competence and rationality. We will investigate Davidson's ideas further in [Section 3].

"the test is designed to throw light on the nature of thought." (Davidson 1990b, 1)

Where does Davidson agree

- There should be an empiric test for thought

Possibility of General/Strong AI might well be possible

- Davidson sees no argument why AI shouldn't be possible
- AI through Brain simulation should be possible

See also 'Representation and Interpretation' (Davidson 1990a)

No need for introspection into working of mind

- against Searle's Chinese room?

Rejection of sharp distinction between mental and physical abilities

- There is no sharp distinction between physical (especially sensory) and mental abilities
- 

distinction between semantic and syntactic abilities (E5.8)

## 2.2 Davidson's Proposal for a modified Test

(E4.5)

History of interaction with the world

- The ability to determine non predefined meaning is essential for intelligence

## 2.3 Distinction between Practical Interpretation and Essential Theory of Interpretation

(E4.8, E5.8)

distinction between sufficient and necessary conditions of linguistic competence

Unified Theory, Radical Interpretation

Successful Communication & Anti-Conventionalism & Holism of knowledge

## 3 Necessary Conditions of Understanding

### 3.1 Social aspect of Language

(E5.8)

relevance of interpretation rather than meaning (+E2.2)

- see similarities to Gadamer's Hermeneutics of Wirkungsgeschichte (Bertram 2012)

Intention in communication (+E5.10)

Interpretation of communication

Truth only determined through communication

- see also Plato, Socrates (E5.16)

No a priori knowledge about language(-learning), only empirical knowledge (E2.1)

Finite number of semantic primitives (E2.1)

Arguments for primacy of ideology over language

- Malapropisms and the like (E5.7)

Wittgenstein's norm of actually getting it right in language

- also see language game analogy in anti conventionalism (2.18)
- and importance of distinction between true and false beliefs in triangulation (E3.14)

### 3.2 Anti-Conventionalism

(E2.18)

arguments against conventionalism

- impossibility of public sign for sincerity

language game analogy (+E5.8)

### 3.3 Ontology & Holism of Knowledge

Ontology of only objects and events (E3.14, E5.4)

Directness of knowledge of world

- no intermediary entities (5.3, E5.4, E3.10)
- no mentales, language only through communication, meaning given causally by objects events (E5.9)

Anomalous monism & supervenience of the mental (E1.11, E3.14)

- parallels to Spinoza's causal theory of affects (E5.20)
- see arguments for irreducibility of mental in Tirangulation (E3.14)

Rejection of Third Dogma of Empiricism (E2.13)

Semantics as a Method for Metaphysics (E5.3)

- if we have semantics right, we know what objects exist
- problems: inscrutability, we only think exist

Truth as elementary non-reducible concept (E5.2, E2.I)

## 4 Explanation of Rationality

### 4.1 Davidson's Program

(E2.9, E2.2)

Tarski's Convention-T

holistic measure for T-Sentences (E2.9)

Relation between meaning of words and expressions (+2.1)

- only expressions have meaning not words
- How words contribute to meaning is determined comparatively

Method to determine meaning from finite sets of properties of sentences (E2.1)

Truth as relation between sentence, time, speaker (at least) (E2.2)

Truth conditions as meaning

Truth functionality determines whether interpretation is correct

Axioms of truth theories as laws, supporting counterfactual claims (E2.12)

Literal Meaning of metaphors (E2.17)

Principle of Charity

### 4.2 Radical Interpretation

(E2.9)

Dependence of semantic and foundational theories of meaning (SEP Meaning Lewis, E2.18, E3.14, E5.8)

- The rules of interpretation only emerge in communication (adjusting prior to passing theories)

Intersubjective Knowledge (of other minds) (E3.14)

Belief about truth of sentence (E3.14)

Quine's radical Translation

Hierarchy of Radical Interpretation process (E2.9, E4.8)

- always true sentences => logical connectives
- sentences true under observations => non-abstract terms
- ... => all else

convention as pragmatic tool for syntax and grammatical mood determination (E2.18, E5.8)

Prior and passing theory of interpretation (E5.7, E4.8, E2.18)

Principle of Charity

### 4.3 Triangulation

(E3.14)

Distinctiveness of three types of Knowledge (subjective, intersubjective, objective)

Three Questions of Epistemology

- how to know other minds
- how to know world
- how to know own mind without evidence

Rejection of skepticism (+SEP Davidson, E4.1)

Rejection of empiricist Epistemology (E2.1)

- No primacy of names and predicates in the foreground of senses
- doesn't he contradict that in E2.9 and E4.8?

Rejection of Positivism (reductionism to world knowledge)

Reasons for Irreducibility/anomalism of Mental to Physical (+E4.8)

- Irreducibility of knowledge of belief to knowledge of world
- causal nature of the mental (+E1.11, E4.8)
- Missing independent mode of communication about mental theories (+E4.8)

Rejection of Cartesian Etymology (primacy of knowledge of one's own mind) (+E3.3, E3.13)

Principle of Charity (Coherence and Correspondence) (E2.9, E3.14)

Reaction to stimuli

- proximal vs. distal stimuli (E5.4)

Meaning as sentences (E2.2)

- not things in world
- not entities sui generis

Inscrutability of Reference / Indeterminacy of meaning (Quine Word and Object, E5.3, E2.16, E3.14)

Importance of distinction between true and false beliefs (E5.8, E3.14, E4.1, SEP Davidson)

#### 4.4 Unified Theory of Thought and Meaning

(E4.8, E4.10)

empirical and holistic character of theory

Probabilistic decision theory

Arguments for psychology as proper scientific theory

Constraint on unified theory

- Perfect logicians
- Purely Rational
- Theoretic
- ignorance of emotion, intention, perception as independent variables

Normativity of theory (+E3.14)

Externalistic theory

Intentionality and Causation (E3.14)

- Causal connection between physical and psychological phenomena (E3.14, E1.1, E1.11)

Paradox of Irrationality (E4.12)

Relation to Behaviorism

## Conclusion

Davidson, Donald. 1990a. "Representation and Interpretation." In *Problems of Rationality: Philosophical Essays Volume 4*, 87–99. Clarendon Press.

———. 1990b. "Turing's Test." In *Modelling the Mind*, edited by K S. Oxford University Press.